

Frequently Asked Questions

Why consider a dental career?

Dentistry offers a dynamic, stimulating field with a variety of professional opportunities which are not generally subject to the effects of managed care. The net average incomes for dentists in private practice have increased by over 96% since 1990. Dentists are generally able to enter practice directly upon completion of the four years of dental school. The lifestyle of a private practice dentist is typically predictable and self-determined.

What does a dentist do?

Dentists are trained to diagnose and treat diseases, injuries, and malformations of the teeth and mouth. They can also alter a patient's appearance by using a variety of cosmetic dental procedures (veneers for example). They may also routinely perform surgical procedures such as implants, tissue grafts, and extractions. Dentists will educate their patients on how to better care for their teeth to prevent oral disease. Dentists can also train others to be dentists or dental hygienists.

How can I prepare for a career in dentistry while still in high school?

You need to obtain a broad exposure to science and math while in high school -- enroll in college preparatory classes in biology, algebra and chemistry, all that your school has to offer! When you are looking for a college to attend, be sure that they have a vibrant and up to date pre-dental program which has recently (within one year) seen students successfully apply and be admitted to dental school. You might volunteer or job shadow at your family dentist's office, orthodontist's office, or pediatric dentist's office to see whether you really want to be part of the dental field. Look for opportunities to do medical mission work in the dental area.

What are the criteria that dental schools use to admit students?

Admission committees generally assess and rank applicants as qualified and desirable based upon the results from the Dental Admission Test (DAT), the grade point average (GPA), letters of recommendation, and interviews. Only courses that have been taken at the college level will be considered in calculating your GPA.

What classes are prerequisites for dental school admission?

All dental schools require the following courses:

- 1 year of Biology with lab (Biol 121, Biol 122)
- 1 year of Inorganic Chemistry with lab (Chem 121, Chem 122)
- Organic Chemistry with lab (Chem 249, Chem 250)
- Physics with lab (Phys 201, Phys 202)

Almost all also require that you take a semester of English (usually writing based).
(Eng 111, or Eng 211)

Some also require the courses below, while others simply suggest them as beneficial:

- Anatomy and Physiology (Biol 249, Biol 253)
- Biochemistry (Chem 324, Chem 325 (lab))
- Psychology (Psy 201)
- Mathematics (in some fashion, generally Calculus) (Math 201)

Most dental schools also note that the following courses can be advantageous:

- Business
- A Foreign Language

What should I major in?

While the practice of dentistry is grounded in scientific principals, there are no specific majors you must choose in order to be admitted to a graduate program. Admissions committees may give candidates with well rounded transcripts more consideration than those more narrowly focused on science though it is highly recommended that you obtain a solid foundation in the natural sciences. The most popular majors for dental school applicants and enrollees for the 2005-2006 class were Biological Sciences at 53% of applicants and Chemistry/Physics at 12% of applicants.

Who do I talk to if I need more information?

At Harding we have a pre-dental advisor (Dennis Province) who can answer your questions. You can reach him at dprovince@harding.edu or by phone at 501-279-4265. The American Dental Education Association has a website (www.adea.org) full of information for those interested in dentistry and dental related fields.